

## Schwartz, Katrina Z.S.: Nature and National Identity after Communism: Globalizing the Ethnoscape

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The next two articles are devoted to case studies of the Czech Republic and Hungary. In the first, 'Debate on the Eurozone Accession in the Czech Republic', Petr Gocev presents arguments for and against adopting the Euro. However, more interesting here is the identification of vested interest groups, and the conclusion that 2012 is unlikely to be the year that the Czech Republic adopts the Euro. In the other article, 'Three Jumps to Cross the River: An Inquiry into the Hungarian Eurozone Accession Failure', László Andor informs readers about the history of the transformation in Hungary and its failed attempt to comply with the Maastricht criteria. Again, like in Béla Galgóczi's contribution, one of the conclusions is that the criteria are not suited to CEE economies. The author also poses the question of whether there is a need to find an alternative to Euro monetary arrangements for CEE. This would open up a new but in fact unnecessary area of research.

The final article, 'Dollarisation in Latin America and Euroisation in Eastern Europe: Parallels and Differences', by Joachim Becker, has much more in common with the Villalba and Visca text. A comprehensive analysis of the role of the dollar in Latin America and the Euro in CEE ought to have been grouped together in one section.

Although heterogeneous this volume is a very valuable contribution to the discussion about the past and future of Central and Eastern European countries, especially the former members of the Visegrád group. It should certainly be recommended to academics and policy-makers, especially those who are enthusiastic about adopting the Euro. By pointing out some possible adverse effects of Euroisation, the book fills a gap in the literature and could serve as a useful tool for shaping a successful policy for the full introduction of the Euro into CEE countries. On the other hand, there seems to be too much pessimism and

ambivalence in the book, and the authors appear unable to decide whether the transformation results and future prospects are positive or not.

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**Katrina Z. S. Schwartz: *Nature and National Identity after Communism: Globalizing the Ethnoscape***

Pittsburgh, PA, 2006: University  
of Pittsburgh Press, 312 pp.

Katrina Z. S. Schwartz's *Nature and National Identity after Communism* is concerned with the hopes for (and threats to) the Latvian landscape brought about by the independence of Latvia from the former USSR and its accession to the EU in 2004. Environmentalists in the old EU member states were excited by the natural assets that the new countries were bringing to the EU, assets that old Europe had destroyed by production pressures and demanding lifestyles. Decades of an inefficient economy and the military occupation of large areas had had a catastrophic impact on nature, but also had some positive outcomes. But it also became clear that natural assets in Central and Eastern Europe were at risk from fast, unregulated economic growth. Katrina Schwartz thus poses, albeit indirectly, a well-known question about the en-

vironment: can post-communist countries avoid the mistakes of the West?

Soon after the fall of communism, international consultants and aid project directors from Europe, the USA and Canada rushed in to save whatever was possible. They offered financial resources and compelling esoteric rhetoric, with words such as 'sustainability', 'public hearing', and 'SWOT analysis'. Schwarz enquires into how Latvia responded to Western environmental projects. She introduces the reader to the key dimensions of conservation efforts in Latvian nature such as the revival of the traditional, park-like agricultural landscape, with scattered vegetation and wet meadows, saving the valuable coastline, attempts to restore the pre-agricultural mosaic grassland landscape by importing semi-wild horses (a method that complies with contemporary ecological theories), and the renewal of 'European wilderness', represented by species-rich forests. The book presents detailed and well-documented case studies of the projects with thrilling plot development and dénouement.

The author, who has family roots in Latvia, knowledgeably describes the historical development of Latvians' relationship with nature. She focuses on modern history, starting in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and especially on the period since the beginning of the First Republic. Her choice of time period is related to her interpretation key: in Latvia, the social/cultural construction of landscape as an 'ethnoscape' has been a decisive factor in Latvia's acceptance or refusal of current environmental efforts. The book structure reflects the key hypothesis regarding Latvians' nationality-based attitudes towards landscape.

The first part of the book is entirely dedicated to describing and interpreting Latvians' patriotic relationship with nature. On the one hand, Latvia is depicted as a maritime crossroads of cultures, with Riga the gateway to the world. On the other

hand, the Herderian picture of the Latvian National Awakening, which solidified during the First Republic (1918–1940), became a political tool. Latvians came to understand themselves as a nation of farmers, working diligently on the family farmstead and taking care of the landscape with love. The later brutal experiences of the Latvian nation solidified and strengthened this symbol in a nostalgic way, as the Red Army occupation of Latvia in 1940 led to land nationalisation, forced collectivisation and the destruction of private farmsteads. In 1941, more than 14 000 farmers were deported to forced labour camps in northern and central parts of the Soviet Union. During the second wave, in 1949, 43 000 kulaks were deported. In the 1950s, the Soviet government started an agricultural programme that pushed for maximum production at any price. This effort mainly translated into the destruction of small drainage ditches and in the large-scale drying of the landscape. In the 1960s, population migration to the cities finalised the depopulation of the landscape. Meanwhile, immigration policy brought new settlers to Latvia from Belarus and other parts of the Soviet Union. The number of ethnic Latvians in the country dropped from 76% in 1939 to 53% in 1985.

A comparison of Latvian and Czech attitudes towards the landscape reveals a number of clear differences. In recent decades Czech researchers have carried out several research projects on agriculturalists [Lapka 2007; Librová 1988; Lokoč 2008]. In in-depth interviews with 24 Czech farmers, Radim Lokoč formulated a question that resonates with one of K. Schwarz's topics: Is the contemporary farmer willing to be a steward of the landscape? His interviews revealed reservations about and resistance to EU projects. The research did not find any patriotic motives, or even patriotic rhetoric among Czech farmers. If we draw a connection between these findings, which differ from the Latvian find-

ings, and the two countries' different histories, Katrina Schwartz's hypothesis about the patriotic sentiments of Latvian farmers towards the landscape appears to be supported. The matter is more complex, however. What shapes Czech farmers' attitudes towards the landscape and towards EU environmental policies? Economic motivations – a factor Schwartz notes but does not consider dominant – is a key factor. In addition, Czech farmers, especially older farmers, seem proud of their role as the providers for the people, not explicitly the nation. Such an attitude is difficult to combine with the role of caretaker of scattered vegetation and tourists.

Sociological research discovered other elements in farmers' attitudes. Despite the gradual acknowledgement of some environmental knowledge, farmers' attitudes towards the landscape bear the imprints of ancient cultural and even evolutionary stereotypes. Tribal cults and myths, perhaps reaching all the way back to the evolution of *Homo sapiens* on the savannah, promote a reverence for trees, a dislike for an 'untidy forest' (horror silvarum?), a view of the forest as a repository of wood, a loathing for wilderness and especially wetlands, a dislike for chaos and a love of order [see Wilson 1984; Orr 1993]. Perhaps these roots may explain the shared preference of the otherwise differently motivated Czechs and Latvians, and even non-European nations, for a wooded steppe landscape [Wilson 1984], or in culturological terminology, the Arcadian landscape [Librová 1988; Schama 1995]. The traditionally worked agricultural landscape corresponds to this Arcadian landscape.

The contemporary utilitarian and production-oriented attitude of farmers towards nature is not only the result of a need to earn a living and prevail against the competition. It is also rooted in the experience of generations of farmers who have struggled every day with the encroachment of nature. Can we put aside

such constant elements in human attitudes toward landscapes when we try to understand their reactions to global environmental efforts to preserve and increase ecological diversity?

Research shows that Latvians respond in different ways to various types of Western environmental projects. They have welcomed those that protect the agricultural ethnoscape and view negatively the initiatives that support wild biodiversity. Schwartz considers this to be proof of her basic hypothesis. Can it, though, also be that these findings indicate the existence of those older culturally non-specific attitude levels? Katrina Schwartz knows the interpretations that underscore the relevance of anthropological constants (p. 19). These attitudes, after all, emerge from the research interviews, especially in the chapter entitled 'We like *Ordnung*'. But the author does not give them enough attention, does not weigh their strength vis-à-vis her hypothesis, according to which the nationalistic agrarian approach to landscape is not beneficial to environmental efforts aimed at strengthening the climax landscape.

The question remains whether the support for this hypothesis is not based on one methodological particularity. Schwartz conducted interviews primarily with environmental advocates, central and regional officials, scientists, ecotourism providers, international consultants, logging executives, etc. She rarely interviewed farmers. From the perspective of political decision-making, the selected interviewees were of greater importance. But are *these* individuals' attitudes crucial in determining people's everyday behaviour towards the landscape? Perhaps interviews with farmers in Latvia would uncover further barriers to the implementation of Western European projects other than nationalist motivations. Let us not forget that contemporary social norms command us to 'love nature'. Is it not possible that in Latvia,

where nationalist values are important, the patriotic rhetoric is an attempt to rationalise subconscious and culturally developed, or even evolutionary, hostile attitudes towards wilderness? Or may the rhetoric reflect a self-projection attempt to legitimate the pragmatic productivist attitude towards the landscape? One can imagine that such rhetorical manoeuvring is more readily employed by officials and activists than by farmers themselves, as the latter face a harsh reality and have no qualms about speaking of it openly.

In conclusion, if Schwartz's interpretation pointing to patriotic motivations were justified, it would bode well for future development. If over-stressed nature gives us enough time, it is likely that, given demographic developments, the nationalist motivation will decrease in nation states over the coming decades given demographic developments. The author reflects on and discusses this topic and hopes that the narrow nationalist view will be relinquished and replaced with an environmental internationalism capable of allowing us to 're-imagine territoriality'. That is a nice thought, which corresponds to the well-known vision of bioregionalism [Sale 1983].

More questions arise when reading the section in the book on the future of Latvian nature. The first question is bio-ecological one and concerns possible irreversible damage to nature and the limited potential of 'restoration ecology', which the author describes in the sixth chapter. The second question is of no less import, but the author could not yet have raised it in 2006. The book was written at a time when we all took the over-production of food for granted. If the current trend of worldwide food shortages continues or becomes even more serious, 'post-productivist and post-agrarian paradigms', which support the steward of the landscape and the restrained fisherman, will be questioned to a much greater degree than has been the case, especially in a small country making reference to

national tradition. Lastly, it should be mentioned that when reading this book one is charmed by the images of the Latvian landscape – the beauty of Latvian groves and wetland forests, migratory bird refuges, long remote coastal areas, and a family farmstead (*viensēta*) set in the shade of an ancient oak tree. One is immediately drawn in by the book's prologue, based on the stories of the author's great-aunt, Laura Zinaīda Strautzelis, as it describes her life on the farmstead, the nesting sites of songbirds in old hollow trees, and even the futile resistance to the progressivist draining projects. Note that while the nature-loving Aunt Laura was not a biologist, she spoke four languages and sometimes quoted from the Classics.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Review translated by Renata and Benjamin Vail.

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